

Governor's Institute of Vermont 2017

Golden Gate High School- Bryan Estrada

GIV. An Acronym. Three simple letters. These three, simple letters changed my life and who I am today. The Governor's Institute of Vermont is an impeccable program that focused on Current Issues and Youth Activism. It was an influential movement that focused on controversial discussions that are often hindered by comfort levels and cultural barriers. In addition, there was much conversing in Leadership workshops and UN Simulations. The program had approximately 93 students, originating from Ireland, Spain, Germany, Vermont, Chicago, New York, New Hampshire, Houston, Key West, and Naples.

After getting on the plane, distancing myself from family and friends, and reaching an unpredictable destination, I didn't know what laid ahead of me. Excitement and nervousness were running throughout my body, as if they competing for my attention. My group from Naples landed in Baltimore before heading towards Hartford, Connecticut. There, we were picked up by one of the most influential people from the program, Michelle. From Hartford to Brattleboro, the drive was only one and a half hours long. Passing through Massachusetts was very neat. As soon as we got to Brattleboro, I was mesmerized by the little, peculiar town. It was unlike anything I've seen before, since I come from a flat area. We were the first and only ones to arrive. After settling down, they took us out to eat at a small, cute ice cream place before swimming in a river. Apparently, that's a Vermont thing to do, which was quite an experience. The days after everyone came were tremendously phenomenal.

We were to choose one workshop that was held for two hours every morning. The choices were Politics, World Religion & Violence, Leadership, Youth Identity & Social Change, and Education for Social Change. The most intriguing was World Religion & Violence. Amer, the teacher of the class, explained the topic very explicitly and immediately, I was hooked. Getting my first choice, I was ready to learn about the topic that Amer was so passionately speaking about. At the beginning of the class, he would insist on starting with

drives humans to damage the Earth with violence. That class opened up my mind to the possibilities of what “force” can do to a person. Another workshop that was introduced to us was Forum Theatre. It was the opportunity to use our own creativity through photography, film, street art, music, drawing, dancing, poetry, creative writing, and collages, as a form of youth activism. I choose photography and expressed my own form of activism. The people in my forum theatre were all special in their own ways. They were truly inspiring , young individuals that were really supportive, especially the teachers of the class.

Besides the workshops, we also did a Mock Congress. We were put into small groups and were to either Pass, Kill, or amend a bill. It was interesting to come across the ideas

my group had. Nonetheless, we ended up amending the bill. Relating to the Mock Congress, we did a simulation of the UN. We each had a partner and picked a country. The country that I choose was Mexico. We had to come to a solution about climate change. Surprisingly, we came to the agreement of the situation.

This program was truly inspiring and phenomenal. I got really close with the International students, especially the ones from Ireland. There were two girls from Ireland that I've come to know so deeply and had the honor to talk and bond with, Ashling and Niamh. I came to first know Niamh as I saw her sitting by herself and decided to sit with somebody that I didn't know. We got to talk and share our experiences. Learning about the Irish government, the school system, and the lifestyle, was truly marvelous. Later on, Niamh introduced me to Ashling, who I adore and have come to deeply love. I found out that she is truly inspiring and does a whole lot for her community. A truly young activist. Another unforgettable memory would have to be the Drive-In movie theatre. Being my first one, I don't know how to fully express it in words. I hope Drive-In movies can make a comeback someday.

GIV has impacted me greatly. It has made me grown as a person. Being more open- minded than I can possibly imagine, accepted, supported, and most importantly feeling as though I have a voice. The Governor's institute of Vermont has shown me that we can make a difference in this world. All we need to start is...our voice. "Show me what democracy looks like! This is what democracy looks like!" (A chant from the parade).

Thank you NCWA, for without you, I wouldn't have become the person I am today.